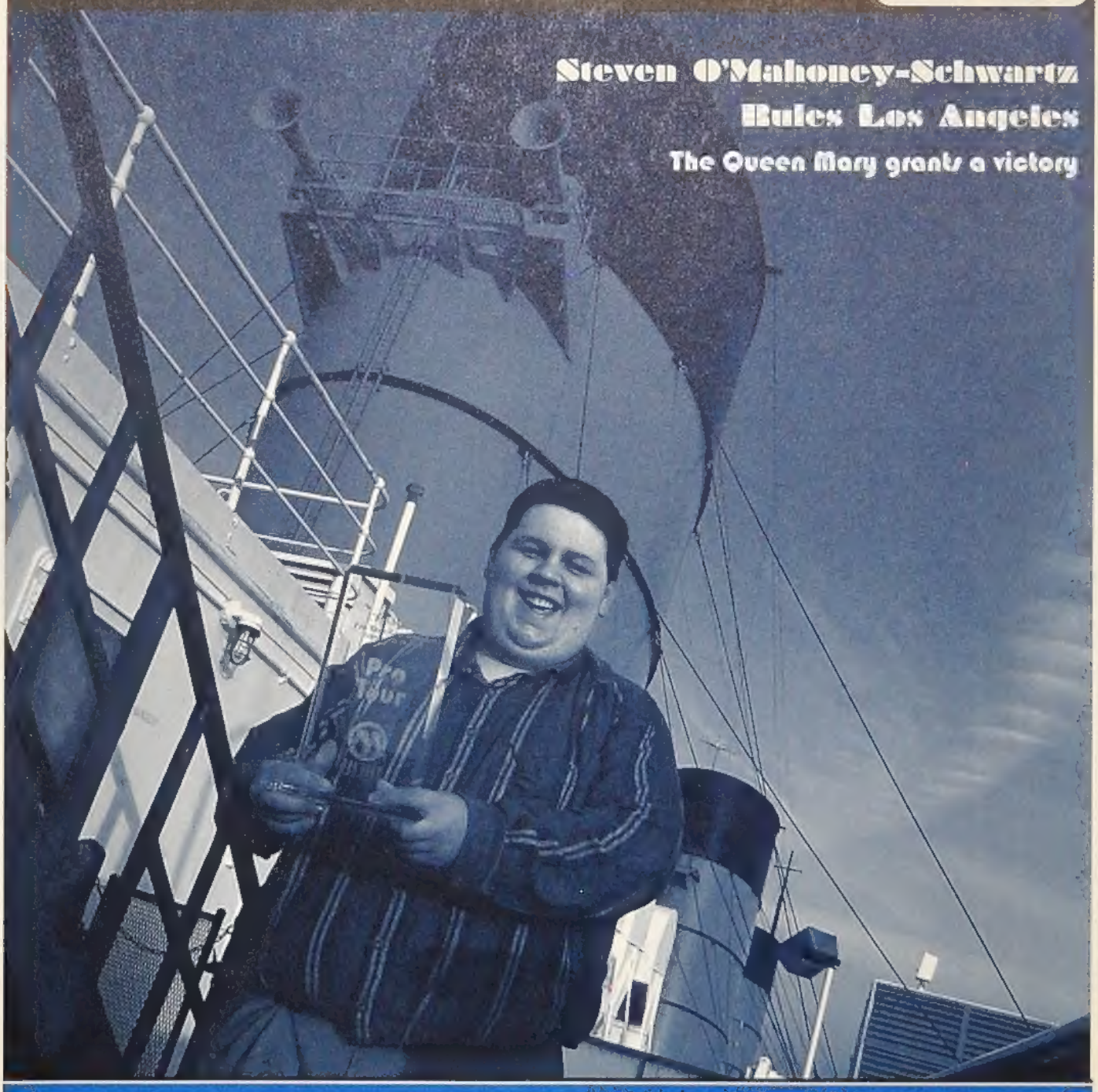
Magic The Gathering

THE SIDEBOARD

May 1999

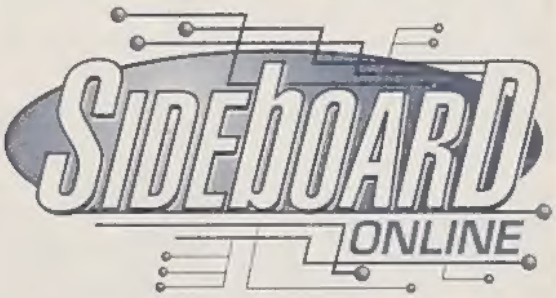
THE OFFICIAL TOURNAMENT MAGAZINE FROM WIZARDS OF THE COAST

NUMBER 23



Steven O'Mahoney-Schwartz Rules Los Angeles

The Queen Mary grants a victory



www.sideboard.com

DCI LEGEND MEMBERSHIP

Join the DCI and get the latest lowdown from the biggest Magic: The Gathering organization in the world.

Initiation Package (new members only): $30
Package includes a special membership card; one Italian-language Legends booster pack; home delivery of *The Sideboard* for one year; special access to advertised events at Pro Tour stops; and other benefits as they become available.

1999 Annual Dues (renewing members): $15
Annual dues include home delivery of *The Sideboard*; special access to advertised events at Pro Tour stops; and other benefits as they become available.

Call 1-800-324-6496 to order or send in attached form.

QUANTITY	PACKAGE	PRICE	TOTAL
_____	New Members	$30.00	_____
_____	Renewals	$15.00	_____

PAYMENT INFORMATION
CHECK: Make checks payable to Wizards of the Coast
CREDIT CARD INFORMATION:

Card # _____ Expiration _____

Signature _____

MAIL TO:
DCI, Wizards of the Coast, P.O. Box 707, Renton, WA 98057-0707

Please allow 3–4 weeks for shipping and handling. Allow 6–12 weeks for delivery of your first issue of The Sideboard. Canadian orders: initiation package, $39; 1998 annual dues, $20. Send U.S. funds only.

THE SIDEBOARD

Volume 4, Issue 2, May 1999

PUBLISHER
David Hoppe
EDITOR
Monty Ashley
COPYEDITOR
Britt Scott
CONTENT REVIEWER
Mark Rosewater
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
Kim Eberfet, Beth Moursund, Alex Shvartsman, Jack Lewis Stanton, and Gary Wise
PRODUCTION MANAGER
Jill Johnson
ART DIRECTOR
Jeremy Bills
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
Jennifer Wood

PRO TOUR STAFF
PRO TOUR SHOW MANAGER
Diana Johns
DCI TOURNAMENT MANAGER
Jeff Donais
HEAD JUDGE
Charlie Catino
SENIOR JUDGES
Nat Fairbanks, Dan Gray, Cyril Grillon, Mike Guptil, and Chris Zantides
JUDGES
Bob Blackman, Peter Costantinidis, David Doust, Ken Horton, Colin Jackson, Michael McKinnon, Doug McCarthy, Jason Molek, Joseph Pennell, Ray Powers, Randy Ryerson, Matt Stenger, and Sean Vance
STATISTICIAN
Kevin Endo
COLOR COMMENTATORS
Chris Pikula and Brian Weissman

WIZARDS OF THE COAST STAFF
ORGANIZED PLAY BRAND MANAGER
David Hoppe
ORGANIZED PLAY ASSISTANT BRAND MANAGER
Jeff Donais
EVENT PROPERTIES MANAGER
Chris Galvin
DCI DATABASE ADMINISTRATOR
Gordon Culp
DCI POLICY ADMINISTRATOR
Elaine Ferrao
DCI TOURNAMENT SUPPORT MANAGER
R. E. Dalrymple
ARENA LEAGUE COMMISSIONER
Garon Galloway
ORGANIZED PLAY MARKETING MANAGER
Diane Brasa
PRO TOUR PLAYER COORDINATOR
Laura Warnick
MAGIC GAME DESIGNER
Richard Garfield
WIZARDS OF THE COAST PRESIDENT
Peter Adkison

The Sideboard is published monthly by Wizards of the Coast, Inc., P.O. Box 707, Renton, WA 98057-0707, United States of America.
©1999 Wizards of the Coast, Inc. No part of this magazine may be reproduced (except for review purposes) without the prior written permission of the publisher. Material published in *The Sideboard* does not necessarily reflect the opinions of Wizards of the Coast, Inc., its employees, or its editorial staff, who are not liable for opinions expressed herein. Wizards of the Coast, Magic: The Gathering, Magic, The Rite Circle, Arabian Nights, Antiquities, The Dark, Legends, Fallen Empires, Ice Age, Chronicles, Alliances, Mirage, Visions, Weatherlight, Tempest, Stronghold, Exodus, Urza's Saga, Urza's Legacy, Unglued, Revised Edition, Fourth Edition, Fifth Edition, Portal, The Sideboard, Magic: The Gathering Pro Tour, Arena, and DCI are trademarks of Wizards of the Coast, Inc.

Pro Tour–Los Angeles Recap

O'Mahoney-Schwartz takes home the victory

For the fourth year in a row, the *Queen Mary* oceanliner in Long Beach Harbor played host to the Los Angeles stop of the Pro Tour, as well as the Western Division Championship of the Junior Super Series (for the second year in a row). An amazing creation, the *Queen Mary* is a breathtaking apparition rising from the harbor. Bigger than the *Titanic*, she is both graceful and stunning in magnificence. With a variety of affordable bars, restaurants, and room accommodations, the *Queen Mary* proves time and time again to be the perfect choice for holding a Pro Tour event.

In the Open portion of the Junior Super Series Western Divisional, 28 players competed in the 14-and-under age group, while 52 entered the 15-to-17 competition. The startling news was the amount of Recurring Nightmare and Dream Halls/Spiral decks entering the field. These decks represented over 70 percent of the decks played during the Open competition. In the main Western Division Championship the following day, 55 players played in the 14-and-under group and 61 in the 15-to-17 group. In the 14-and-under competition, Rodney Burt, Jr. took home the title, with Mike Hall, Justin Alpert, Jay Elarar (Defending Junior Super Series World Champion), Aaron Hiemstra, Kirk Cole, Jimmy dela Cruz, and Chase Altemara finishing out the Top 8. In the 15-to-17 age group, it was Adam Prokopin winning on tiebreakers, while David Fornalski, Troy Goettel, Brandon Mincey, Sean Keady, Philip Freneau, Jake Brubaker, and John Meeth rounded out the Top 8. With their Top 8 finishes, each of these players will advance to the final day of the Junior Super Series Championship to be held in Orlando, Florida in late May.

This year's Pro Tour—Los Angeles saw 336 players from around the world make the trip to compete for $152,000 in prize money and future invitations. The format was *Urza's Saga* Rochester Draft, a favorite among most high-caliber Magic players. After Friday's competition, Canada's Terry Lau and Pittsburgh's Erik Lauer stood atop the leader board with matching 7-0 records, while several Pro Tour veterans and champions kept close at 6—1.

During the second day of Pro Tour—Los Angeles, some of the greatest names in Magic fought for a chance to play in Sunday's finals. In the 14th and final round of Swiss competition, five of the Top 8 spots had already been decided, while the fight over the remaining three brought the most excitement to the day. *Duelist* Invitational players Svend Sparre Geertsen and Brian Hacker squared off (Geertsen won 2-1), as well as Steven O'Mahoney-Schwartz against 1997 U.S. National Champion Justin Gary (OMS won 2-1). Though he didn't have a chance at making the Top 8, Erik Lauer was looking to spoil Mike Long's chances (Long won 2-1). All three matches were crucial in deciding the remaining three spots in the Top 8 finals.

Featuring one of the stronger finals in recent Pro Tour memory, former Pro Tour Champions Mike Long (Paris '97) and Jon Finkel (New York '98) made the cut, as well as former runner-up Steven O'Mahoney-Schwartz (Mainz '97). Previous Top 8 players Patrick Chapin (New York '97) and Svend Sparre Geertsen (Worlds '97, Los Angeles '98) made the grade, as well as Top 8 newcomers Worth Wollpert, Lucien Bui, and Terry Lau. In the quarters, Lau made short work of Chapin, sweeping him 3-0. Long and O'Mahoney-Schwartz fought it out, with O'Mahoney-Schwartz coming out on top 3-1. Winning 3-2 against Svend Sparre Geertsen, Worth Wollpert set himself up for a semifinals showdown with Deadguy teammate Jon Finkel, who defeated Lucien Bui 3-1. In the semis, Finkel showed no mercy, defeating his teammate Wollpert 3-1, while Steven O'Mahoney-Schwartz recorded the longest match in Top 8 history, defeating Canada's Terry Lau 3-2-1. In the finals, O'Mahoney-Schwartz defeated friend and playtest partner Finkel, 3-1. With his championship, O'Mahoney-Schwartz was all smiles. The smile only got bigger when he received a check for $25,000 from Wizards of the Coast CEO Peter Adkison. In an appropriately brief statement, O'Mahoney-Schwartz summed up his feelings regarding the weekend with, "It's all about the boat."

—Jack Lewis Stanton

Table of Contents

The Sideboard
Volume 4, Issue 2
May 1999

1 **Pro Tour–Los Angeles Recap**
Steven O'Mahoney-Schwartz wins

4 **Pro Tour–Los Angeles Decks and Draft**
Complete decklists and expert analyses by Gary Wise

5 **Hard Data: Pro Tour–Los Angeles**
Statistics from every match in Los Angeles

6 **Super Series Western Division Championship**
Juniors show off the premier Standard decks

RETRACTION

In the previous issue of *The Sideboard*, an internal error led to inappropriate statements being printed about certain Arena stores, including Game Trader. These comments should be disregarded completely.

Steven O'Mahoney-Schwartz

There are very few times in your life when the emotion is overwhelmingly positive. After winning Pro Tour—Los Angeles '99, Steven O'Mahoney-Schwartz had this to say: "Winning a Pro Tour is a very unique feeling. It's hard to describe how insanely happy I was after the finals of Pro Tour—L.A."

One of the more recognized players on the Pro Tour, the 18-year-old O'Mahoney-Shwartz prepared when he could for Los Angeles, choosing quality over quantity. After his disappointing last-place finish at the *Duelist* Invitational in Barcelona, the Brooklyn native felt he needed more practice as his playing skills had become rusty during his first two semesters at Boston University. "Living at school in Boston has affected my ability to play a lot. I no longer have the time to practice a lot, so I made sure when I did have time, it was quality time spent with other good players." Players like Hashim Bello, Jon Finkel, Dave Price, Mike Lucarello, Dan O'Mahoney-Schwartz, and other locals would gather at Neutral Ground in New York City, preparing and devising strategy for the tournament. O'Mahoney-Schwartz took advantage of this practice whenever he found his way home during weekends away from school.

With a renewed playing spirit, O'Mahoney-Schwartz stormed the boat, finishing as the third seed overall after the Swiss rounds. But it almost wasn't meant to be. Heading into the last round, he was pitted against former U.S. National Champion Justin Gary. "The pressure was definitely on," said O'Mahoney-Schwartz of his last-round opponent. "Before the second-to-last round I realized that I could double draw to make the Top 8. So I drew with Worth Wollpert. But before the last round Jon Finkel had figured out that one of us would have to be paired down and would have to play instead of draw. I ended up getting paired down as Finkel drew in. I knew it was going to be a tough match. Justin had a very fast green-red deck and my white-red deck was a little bit slower, but had more utility spells." Winning the match 2—1, O'Mahoney-Schwartz found himself in the Top 8 for the first time since his runner-up finish at Pro Tour—Mainz '97.

Drafting an incredibly strong mono-black deck for the finals, O'Mahoney-Schwartz faced off against Mike Long in the quarterfinals, winning the match rather easily, 3—1. "Mike always tries to get into your head before and during a match," said O'Mahoney-Schwartz of his encounter with Long. "Mike tries to gain a psychological advantage over you any way he can, but you just have to ignore him and you'll be fine." In the semifinals, O'Mahoney-Schwartz's next opponent was Canada's Terry Lau. "This was definitely one of the closest matches I've ever had," he pointed out. "Every card drawn and played seemed to have a huge impact on the swing of the game." In what amounted to a huge dog fight, O'Mahoney-Schwartz prevailed in what would prove to be the longest match in Pro Tour history, winning 3—2—1.

In the finals, O'Mahoney-Schwartz sat opposite his long-time friend and playtest partner, the incredible Jon Finkel. In describing the matchup, O'Mahoney-Schwartz mentioned, "I was glad I didn't have to play Jon until the finals. The only better finals I could think of would be my brother and I. Jon and I have been friends for a while now, but that didn't mean there wasn't any pressure in the match. We both still obviously wanted to win." In what proved anti-climatic after his Lau semifinals match, O'Mahoney-Schwartz defeated Finkel 3—1 to become the 1999 Pro Tour—Los Angeles Champion.

—Jack Lewis Stanton

Pro Tour—Los Angeles Finals

Recap

Game One

In an attempt to get a fast start on Jon Finkel, Steven O'Mahoney-Schwartz used a Dark Ritual in order to play a first-turn Bog Raiders. On his next turn, Finkel played an island and cast a Pendrell Flux on the Raider, destroying it on O'Mahoney-Schwartz's (OMS) next turn. Both players tried to establish some kind of creature assault, only to see the other use creature elimination to stop the tide from turning. The tide began to change as OMS cast an Unnerve, taking out Finkel's Path of Peace and Pacifism from hand. A Somnophore looked as though it might swing the skirmish into Finkel's favor, but OMS drew his sixth swamp, allowing him to Corrupt the evil flier. After getting Finkel low on life with an Unworthy Dead and other creatures, OMS cast a Corrupt on Finkel to end the game.

Match Score: O'Mahoney-Schwartz 1, Finkel 0

Game Two

The second game of the match began in much better fashion for Finkel. His turn-two and turn-four Opal Gargoyles were activated after O'Mahoney-Schwartz cast an Unworthy Dead and Phyrexian Ghoul (to go with OMS's third-turn Bog Raiders). In what amounted to a damage race, Finkel was able to Pacify the Ghoul, dealing 4 damage to OMS's three every turn. On the sixth turn, OMS was forced to play a Pestilence without enough mana to get rid of the Gargoyle threats. In the next turn Finkel cast a Monk Realist, targeting the Pestilence for destruction before it could become a problem on OMS's next turn. With little play in hand, OMS cast an Unnerve on Finkel, netting a Path of Peace and Elite Archers. In the following turn Finkel attacked for 4 damage, evening the games at one apiece.

Match Score: O'Mahoney-Schwartz 1, Finkel 1

Game Three

Striving for an early attack, O'Mahoney-Schwartz Dark Ritualed out a Cackling Fiend on turn two (Drifting Meadow pitched). Finkel, looking for Opal Gargoyle success for the second game in a row, played one on his second turn. Turns three and four saw Finkel play a Wizard Mentor and Cathodian, while OMS attacked Finkel's hand with an Unnerve (Curfew, plains pitched). On turn five, OMS attempted to Befoul the Cathodian, only to see it brought back to Finkel's hand via a Curfew (OMS had to bring his Cackling Fiend back to hand). Finkel played the Cathodian once again, only to see it Corrupted on OMS's following turn.

During his next two turns, Finkel played Imaginary Pet and Fog Bank, keeping his hand empty for the Pet. However, OMS drew his Pestilence immediately afterwards, playing it with eight swamps on the board. When Finkel attempted to attack next turn, OMS ran four mana through the Pestilence. In response, Finkel used his Wizard Mentor's ability and returned both the Mentor and Imaginary Pet to hand. Wanting the Pestilence to go away, Finkel kept the creatures in hand and passed the turn to OMS. This was just fine with OMS, who cast an Unnerve on Finkel, taking the Mentor and Pet and leaving Finkel with no cards in hand. At this point, things pretty much went downhill for Finkel. Playing the game of top-deck for the rest of the game, OMS simply outdrew Finkel. After a Corrupt took him down to 2 life, Finkel drew. Failing to find an answer to OMS's Carrion Beetle and Unworthy Dead, he conceded game three, down 2—1.

Match Score: O'Mahoney-Schwartz 2, Finkel 1

Game Four

With both players beginning game four in slow fashion (by turn four, Finkel had Angelic Page and Fog Bank out, compared to O'Mahoney-Schwartz's Phyrexian Ghoul), OMS attempted to break the game open by casting a Hollow Dogs on turn five, only to see it Powersinked. Undaunted, he tried to cast another on his following turn, this time finding success. After Cataloging at the end of OMS's turn, Finkel could only manage to play a Cathodian on his next turn. OMS, sensing the game swinging in his favor, tried to Befoul the Cathodian, only to see it Curfewed in response. On turn eight, OMS played his Pestilence, thus setting up major board control. Trying to find his Monk Realist to take out the Pestilence threat, Finkel drew an Annul on his next turn—a turn too late.

At the end of Finkel's turn, OMS Pestilenced for 2 damage, destroying Finkel's Page and Fog Bank. On his turn, OMS attempted to Befoul Finkel's Cathodian, only to see the attempt countered with a Rewind. So, he played a Phyrexian Ghoul. At this point, Finkel's defenses were crumbling around him. Pestilence was destroying his creatures, and it was only a matter of time before OMS would draw into his three Corrupts (two of which OMS drew on turns nine and ten). At 5 life after an 8-point Corrupt and 5-point Hollow Dogs attack by OMS, Finkel drew his card during his 11th turn. Finding no way to stop the madness, Finkel extended his hand to his friend, conceding the final game and match. Thus, Steven O'Mahoney-Schwartz became the 1999 Pro Tour—Los Angeles Champion.

Final Match Score: O'Mahoney-Schwartz 3, Finkel, 1

—Jack Lewis Stanton

Pro Tour—Los Angeles Finalist

Jon Finkel

Jon Finkel, 20, is a well-known name in Magic organized play, and for a long time has impressed the world by his good and consistent performances. In Los Angeles, he showed once again that he is one of the world's most outstanding players by making yet another Top 8 finish.

Even though a lot of players expected to see him in the Top 8 again, Finkel himself didn't really believe that he would make it. "Mathematically, my chances were less than 50 percent, so I had to say no," he explained calmly. "But I'm glad I made the Top 8, especially when you understand that my odds weren't in my favor for any given tournament," he added. Estimations like that may not be normal for every Tom, Dick, and Harry, but maybe it is normal for an economics student (Finkel majors in economics at Rutgers University).

Finkel's draft strategy was basically to take whatever he got. Black was his favorite color, and in the Swiss rounds he went 4—0 with two black decks—one black-green, and one black-blue. "I just see what comes my way, and take the colors the others aren't taking. One of my strengths is that I am good at adapting, and I choose consistency over power. But black is the best color," said Finkel.

By now, Finkel should be pretty much used to playing in big tournaments, but he still gets nervous before and during a tournament. "I feel the pressure because I do well. Not really because I feel that people expect a lot of me, but I'm sure that is a factor," he admitted.

So far Finkel has had better results in Limited events than in Constructed events: "I guess that's because I tend to play what I like too often in Constructed—not what is best."

—Kim Eikefet

Semifinalist

Worth Wollpert

Worth Wollpert, 24, has for a long time been a less well-known member of the successful Team Deadguy. But being less well known doesn't mean he hasn't done well. The first Pro Tour event he qualified for was Pro Tour—Columbus, where he ended up in 38th place even though he played (in his words) a "really bad deck."

"After that, I was really successful for almost a year and a half. I was number 30 in Pro Tour—Paris, number 14 in Worlds '96, number 11 in Pro Tour—Los Angeles '97, and number 19 in Pro Tour—Dallas. But I lost my talent in Worlds '97—at least I lost all my luck and all my results. I just got unlucky a lot," Wollpert explained.

Now it seems Wollpert has found the old winning formula. In Pro Tour—Los Angeles '99, he made the Top 8 along with his more well-known teammate Jon Finkel. The Deadguys did well in Pro Tour—L.A.

"We're just a bunch of friends that happen to be good players. But we practice a lot, and we have a lot of good Magic minds on our team, so we talk about things a lot. Everybody gets into one collective thinking process," Wollpert said.

In the Swiss rounds he played red and white, then green and black, and finally green and white.

"Everybody knew that black was the best color. The problem was how to adapt if you couldn't play black. Rochester Draft is about color negotiations. You have more control over what the people to your left and right are playing. You can push them out of your colors and end up with a good deck."

Before Los Angeles, Wollpert had a 0—14 record in feature matches. In L.A. he finally overcame the curse. "I was 4—0 in feature matches, and that was amazing—it was the best part of the weekend."

—Kim Eikefet

Semifinalist

Terry Lau

Sometimes persistence pays off. After traveling to several Pro Tour Qualifiers around the Western United States and Canada, Vancouver's own Terry Lau qualified in Seattle during the last weekend of Qualifiers for Los Angeles. In one of the stronger showings in Pro Tour history, the 28-year-old Lau plowed through his Swiss-round opponents, winning his first ten matches before being derailed by Steven O'Mahoney-Schwartz in round eleven. Staying on target after the loss, Lau broke into a Pro Tour Top 8 for only the first time in his Magic career (best finish in six previous Pro Tour events was 20th place at Pro Tour—New York '97). When asked about his showing shortly after the Top 8 finalists were announced, Lau exclaimed, "It feels pretty damned good! All my teammates have been there or close. I'm looking forward to the draft."

Describing his draft strategy, Lau said, "I like to draft fast and cheap creatures, with a little bit of removal. I also draft the colors that come to me, very rarely forcing the colors." This game plan allowed him to draft an incredibly strong white-blue deck during the Top 8 draft. The deck, featuring two Sanctum Custodians, both a Zephid's and Serra's Embrace, protection from red and black creatures, and several strong offensive and defensive creatures, was thought by many to be the strongest in the draft, rivaled only by Steven O'Mahoney-Schwartz's mono-black monstrosity.

In his quarterfinal pairing against Patrick Chapin, Lau dominated the match, winning by an impressive 3—0 score. In the semifinals, though, Lau ran up against Steven O'Mahoney-Schwartz's mono-black creation. In what would end up the longest match in Pro Tour history, both players fought it out, with O'Mahoney-Schwartz winning the sixth and deciding game to take the match 3—2—1 (one game was a draw due to O'Mahoney-Schwartz's use of Pestilence to force the issue). Ever the optimist, Lau was glad to make the semifinals and looks forward to his auto-qualification due to his amazing finish.

—Jack Lewis Stanton

Quarterfinalist

Lucien Bui

Pro Tour—Los Angeles was Lucien Bui's first Pro Tour event ever. But the 18-year-old French high school student wasn't afraid of playing against the big-name players. Quite on the contrary, Bui beat one opponent after the other and ended up as the top seed in a star-studded Top 8.

"It's very good, but I hadn't expected this," Bui admitted. "I just played as I usually do." Bui started playing Magic just after the *Ice Age* set was released. He saw a brief report about the game on TV, and a friend of his played, so Bui and his friend started playing together.

"I am very competitive, and I like winning. When I win I enjoy it, but when I lose, it isn't important. So I'm not nervous before a tournament," Bui explained.

In Los Angeles Bui drafted four solid decks, three of which contained green. "Normally I prefer green because of the good creatures, but I also like red and black." Still, Bui didn't have a specific strategy, except that he tried to take the good cards.

The money Bui won in L.A. will come in handy for the young Frenchman. He plans to use the money to pay for future Pro Tour travels, and to pay back his friend who loaned him the money to get to L.A. In addition, the Top 8 finish gives Bui important Pro Tour player points. His French friends were very happy for him. "Now, I just have to try and do my best," Bui said, smiling.

—Kim Eikefet

Quarterfinalist

Pat Chapin

In the ever-stressful world of Magic, it's refreshing to see a player like Patrick Chapin who thoroughly enjoys himself during the competition, win or lose. A native of Ann Harbor, Michigan, Chapin was looking to top his previous heights of Magic play (Pro Tour—Dallas '96 semifinalist (Junior), Pro Tour—New York '97 quarterfinalist) during Pro Tour—Los Angeles '99. After fighting his way through 14 grueling rounds of Swiss play, Chapin found himself the number-two seed going into the Top 8. Playing against Terry Lau in the quarterfinals, Chapin was swept 3—0, all the while maintaining an air of happiness at playing in the finals.

An Eastern Michigan University student, the 18-year-old Chapin attributes his success at Magic to the players in the Ann Harbor area. "I moved away from Ann Harbor for a couple of years after my New York Top 8 finish and did bad until moving back to the area again," said Chapin. "Living near good players is so key." In assessing the move, Chapin said, "I'm really excited about the upcoming Pro Tour [events] because I always thought I was better than I had been doing this past year and that my location was holding me down. I'm really excited because I now have good reason to believe that this was the case. I'll be putting a lot of effort into it (practicing and participating in Grand Prix and Pro Tour events) and hopefully, I'll have the year I've always thought I was capable of."

—Jack Lewis Stanton

Quarterfinalist

Svend Sparre Geertsen

Svend Sparre Geertsen, 18, is no newcomer to Magic organized play. The Danish high school student started playing Magic in 1994 after *The Dark* set was released, and over the last years has performed well in several big tournaments: he took fourth-place in Worlds '97 and made the Top 8 in Pro Tour—Los Angeles '98.

This year Geertsen managed to make the Top 8 once again, and of course, he was very satisfied. "I hoped to make at least the Top 32. My strategy was to try and be nice to the players next to me, so I gave them good stuff. I only counter-drafted stuff that could hurt my own deck," Geertsen said. The fact that he plays fast, is able to bluff his opponent, and makes few mistakes also helped throughout the 14 tough rounds of Swiss.

Geertsen drafted five times in Grand Prix—Copenhagen, and won all five drafts. But he got most of his experience in Barcelona during the *Duelist* Invitational, where he drafted against a lot of good players. "That was very good practice for me. You see things differently when you play against good players, and you discover good cards. I think everybody got better after Barcelona."

Geertsen was introduced to Magic through his classmates, who gave him some cards and taught him the game. But the reason why he started playing was to make some money out of it. The more good results he got, the more money he won.

"At home I thought a lot about winning, but I didn't think about it when I was playing in the Swiss rounds. I just took things one step at a time. Of course I want to win, but to get this far, I'm just satisfied," Geertsen grinned.

—Kim Eikefet

Quarterfinalist

Mike Long

Often times when a player disappears from the scene, many don't realize it until much later when talking about the old days with a group of friends. As one of the greatest Magic players of all time, rumors began to circulate that Mike Long was planning to retire in order to concentrate all his time and energy into his store, The End, in Charlottesville, Virginia. When he failed to show for Pro Tour—Rome, many believed the rumors were true, that Long had finally retired from the game of Magic.

For several months there was no Mike Long in Magic. As one of the more controversial players, this pleased some. Then, Long accepted an invitation to the *Duelist* Invitational this year in Barcelona, Spain. After winning, new speculation arose as to whether or not he'd return to the game he had dominated for over four years. Playing intelligent Magic throughout the Swiss portion of Pro Tour—Los Angeles, Long had to defeat Team CMU's Erik Lauer in the last round to make the Top 8. Winning 2—1, Long qualified for yet another Top 8 finals.

Facing eventual champion Steven O'Mahoney-Schwartz, Long was trounced 3—1 in a lopsided affair. Still, not a bad showing for the 'retired guy.' As Long put it, "Top 8 is amazing."

—Jack Lewis Stanton

Top Eight Draft Analysis

Fighting is dumb. Pretty simple statement, but it's amazing how few competitors at Pro Tour–L.A. were able to apply that maxim to their efforts. Steven O'Mahoney-Schwartz was able to follow it, as were Jon Finkel, Terry Lau, and Worth Wollpert. On the other side of the table, Lucien Bui, Pat Chapin, Svend Sparre Geertsen, and Mike Long dueled one another for the rights to specific colors, and they paid, finishing 5–8 respectively.

The draft started simply enough, with O'Mahoney-Schwartz taking the best card in the opening pack, a Befoul, passing a Blanchwood Treefolk to Wollpert and a Voice of Law to Lau. O'Mahoney-Schwartz ended up drafting a mono-black deck which, while needing to use some sub-optimal cards, was able to use cards like Corrupt to their full potential. The second pack provided Wollpert with an interesting choice between Expunge, Citanul Flute, Zephid's Embrace, and Pegasus Charger. Wollpert made a questionable decision, taking Expunge over Zephid's Embrace, essentially sending a message to Lau that he had no interest in blue. "I think Worth taking the Expunge is the reason I won," said O'Mahoney-Schwartz. "Because of that pick, the three guys on my left were not playing black."

Lau, who successfully employed a "draft what they aren't drafting" philosophy throughout the tournament, scooped up the Embrace and never looked back. "I knew the three of them (Wollpert, Finkel, and O'Mahoney-Schwartz) were friends and weren't likely to hate-draft one another, so I sort of latched myself onto them and tried to fill the gaps." While Lau's deck may have ended up being the most solid at the table, a misplay against O'Mahoney-Schwartz in the semifinals cost him.

Sitting next to Lau, Lucian Bui employed the most interesting strategy of the draft. He decided before the first pack was ever opened that he would play red, considered by popular opinion to be the weakest color in the environment. Bui was able to communicate this to the other Top 8 players by taking mediocre red cards over better-than-average cards in other colors (he took Goblin Spelunkers, Imaginary Pet, and Angelic Page with his first pick). The result was a hands-off attitude toward red by his neighbors.

So what does this draft show us? Two things: a) Fighting is dumb. The four drafters who cooperated with one another throughout the draft each won their quarterfinal matches; b) The effect one pick can have on an entire draft is huge. Wollpert's taking Expunge ensured that Lau would not play black, and with O'Mahoney-Schwartz forcing black heavily and Bui taking every red card he saw, a huge gap opened up to O'Mahoney-Schwartz's left, resulting in O'Mahoney-Schwartz picking up a $25,000 check.

–Gary Wise

Top 8 Draft

URZA'S SAGA

FIRST PACK (CLOCKWISE)

	Steven OMS	Worth Wollpert	Terry Lau	Lucien Bui	Mike Long	Svend Geertsen	Pat Chapin	Jon Finkel
PACK ONE	1 Befoul	2 Blanchwood Treefolk	3 Voice of Law	4 Goblin Spelunkers	5 Gorilla Warrior	6 Angelic Page	7 Looming Shade	8 Imaginary Pet
		15 Reflexes	14 Tolarian Winds	13 Raze	12 Guma	11 Stern Proctor	10 Catalog	9 Annul
PACK TWO	8 Wild Dogs	1 Expunge	2 Zephid's Embrace	3 Citanul Flute	4 Hush	5 Pegasus Charger	6 Titania's Chosen	7 Disciple of Law
	9 Smoldering Crater		10 Headlong Rush	11 Voltaic Key	12 Goblin Matron	13 Curfew	14 Sandbar Merfolk	15 Catalog
PACK THREE	7 Blood Vassal	8 Fiery Mantle	1 Sanctum Custodian	2 Arc Lightning	3 Pestilence	4 Order of Yawgmoth	5 Cave Tiger	6 Drifting Meadow
	10 Power Taint	9 Scald		15 Venomous Fangs	14 Arcane Laboratory	13 Disruptive Student	12 Vernal Bloom	11 Spire Owl
PACK FOUR	6 Unworthy Dead	7 Heat Ray	8 Spire Owl	1 Chimeric Staff	2 Pouncing Jaguar	3 Waylay	4 Confiscate	5 Pacifism
	11 Unnerve	10 Priest of Titania	9 Horseshoe Crab		15 Power Taint	14 Claws of Gix	13 Carrion Beetles	12 Rune of Protection: Black
PACK FIVE	5 Cackling Fiend	6 Hush	7 Catalog	8 Dromosaur	1 Befoul	2 Barrin, Master Wizard	3 Skittering Skirge	4 Path of Peace
	12 No Rest for the Wicked	11 Titania's Boon	10 Silent Attendant	9 Treefolk Seedlings		15 Reflexes	14 Headlong Rush	13 Launch
PACK SIX	4 Hollow Dogs	5 Viashino Runner	6 Monk Idealist	7 Endoskeleton	8 Disorder	1 Path of Peace	2 Symbiosis	3 Wizard Mentor
	13 Copper Gnomes	12 Rune of Protection: White	11 Rejuvenate	10 Power Sink	9 Coral Merfolk		15 Gaea's Bounty	14 Launch
PACK SEVEN	3 Corrupt	4 Winding Wurm	5 Rewind	6 Heat Ray	7 Acidic Soil	8 Pendrell Flux	1 Phyrexian Processor	2 Pacifism
	14 Carrion Beetles	13 Priest of Titania	12 Serra Zealot	11 Lull	10 Flesh Reaver	9 Opal Caryatid		15 Fecundity
PACK EIGHT	2 Corrupt	3 Treetop Rangers	4 Exhaustion	5 Shower of Sparks	6 Elvish Lyrist	7 Monk Realist	8 Lull	1 Faith Healer
	15 Breach	14 Serra Zealot	13 Veil of Birds	12 Hidden Guerrillas	11 Falter	10 Serra's Hymn	9 Remote Isle	

SECOND PACK (COUNTERCLOCKWISE)

	Steven OMS	Worth Wollpert	Terry Lau	Lucien Bui	Mike Long	Svend Geertsen	Pat Chapin	Jon Finkel
PACK ONE	8 Fertile Ground	7 Elvish Lyrist	6 Veiled Serpent	5 Goblin Patrol	4 Corrupt	3 Wizard Mentor	2 Child of Gaea	1 Pendrell Drake
	9 Congregate	10 Outmaneuver	11 Seasoned Marshal	12 Breach	13 Rejuvenate	14 Serra Zealot	15 Thran Turbine	
PACK TWO	7 Phyrexian Ghoul	6 Argothian Swine	5 Disenchant	4 Fault Line	3 Cradle Guard	2 Rune of Protection: Green	1 Vampiric Embrace	8 Horseshoe Crab
	10 Unnerve	11 Retromancer	12 Curfew	13 Goblin Spelunkers	14 Slippery Karst	15 Cloak of Mists		9 Shimmering Barrier
PACK THREE	8 Hollow Dogs	5 Dromosaur	4 Path of Peace	3 Viashino Runner	2 Duress	1 Opal Gargoyle	8 Outmaneuver	7 Power Sink
	11 Reclusive Wight	12 Viashino Weaponsmith	13 Angelic Chorus	14 Thran Turbine	15 Gaea's Bounty		9 Launch	10 Rune of Protection: White
PACK FOUR	5 Duress	4 Viashino Runner	3 Serra's Embrace	2 Winding Wurm	1 Gaea's Embrace	8 Sandbar Serpent	7 Hollow Dogs	6 Opal Gargoyle
	12 Coral Merfolk	13 Bedlam	14 Gaea's Bounty	15 Viashino Weaponsmith		9 Power Sink	10 Polluted Mire	11 Rewind
PACK FIVE	4 Corrupt	3 Heat Ray	2 Veiled Serpent	1 Citanul Centaurs	8 Unworthy Dead	7 Opal Caryatid	6 Diabolic Servitude	5 Pendrell Flux
	13 Venomous Fangs	14 Goblin Lackey	15 Serra Zealot		9 Lull	10 Goblin Raider	11 Priest of Titania	12 Carpet of Flowers
PACK SIX	3 Bog Raiders	2 Symbiosis	1 Humble	8 Viashino Runner	7 Coral Merfolk	6 Power Sink	5 Hollow Dogs	4 Opal Gargoyle
	14 Hawkeater Moth	15 Bravado		9 Viashino Weaponsmith	10 Rune of Protection: White	11 Destructive Urge	12 Ill-Gotten Gains	13 Gaea's Bounty
PACK SEVEN	2 Befoul	1 Blanchwood Treefolk	8 Monk Realist	7 Gorilla Warrior	6 Cackling Fiend	5 Hibernation	4 Spined Fluke	3 Angelic Page
	15 Reflexes		9 Silent Attendant	10 War Dance	11 Dark Ritual	12 Serra's Sanctum	13 Raze	14 Tolarian Winds
PACK EIGHT	1 Phyrexian Ghoul	2 Somnophore	3 Wild Dogs	4 Brilliant Halo	5 Acridian	6 Goblin War Buggy	7 Pit Trap	8 Rune of Protection: Red
		15 Goblin Matron	14 Sicken	13 Hidden Spider	12 Skirge Familiar	11 Crosswinds	10 Cloak of Mists	9 Hermetic Study

THIRD PACK (CLOCKWISE)

	Steven OMS	Worth Wollpert	Terry Lau	Lucien Bui	Mike Long	Svend Geertsen	Pat Chapin	Jon Finkel
PACK ONE	1 Pestilence	2 Shiv's Embrace	3 Sanctum Custodian	4 Symbiosis	5 Bog Raiders	6 Veiled Sentry	7 Grafted Skullcap	8 Power Sink
		15 Scrap	14 Disruptive Student	13 Goblin Patrol	12 Fecundity	11 Rune of Protection: White	10 Fertile Ground	9 Drifting Meadow
PACK TWO	8 Dark Ritual	1 Hopping Automaton	2 Karn, Silver Golem	3 Dromosaur	4 Duress	5 Befoul	6 Cackling Fiend	7 Monk Realist
	9 Presence of the Master		15 Silent Attendant	14 Reflexes	13 Tolarian Winds	12 Launch	11 Gaea's Bounty	10 Shimmering Barrier
PACK THREE	7 Smoldering Crater	8 Elvish Herder	1 Pegasus Charger	2 Wild Dogs	3 Expunge	4 Sanctum Guardian	5 Argothian Swine	6 Disciple of Law
	10 Planar Void	9 Healing Salve		15 Telepathy	14 Exhume	13 Sandbar Merfolk	12 Planar Birth	11 Curfew
PACK FOUR	6 Disciple of Grace	7 Lay Waste	8 Power Sink	1 Winding Wurm	2 Vile Requiem	3 Intrepid Hero	4 Polluted Mire	5 Opal Gargoyle
	11 Wirecat	10 Retaliation	9 Rewind		15 Bravado	14 Viashino Weaponsmith	13 Fortitude	12 Coral Merfolk
PACK FIVE	5 Rune of Protection: Black	6 Heat Ray	7 Veiled Crocodile	8 Priest of Titania	1 Pouncing Jaguar	2 Pacifism	3 Unworthy Dead	4 Fog Bank
	12 Carrion Beetles	11 Lay Waste	10 Lilting Refrain	9 Goblin Raider		15 Opal Caryatid	14 Reclusive Wight	13 Pendrell Flux
PACK SIX	4 Befoul	5 Wild Dogs	6 Monk Realist	7 Hush	8 Cackling Fiend	1 Sandbar Serpent	2 Gaea's Embrace	3 Remote Isle
	13 Headlong Rush	12 Silent Attendant	11 Seasoned Marshal	10 Purging Scythe	9 Sicken		15 Reflexes	14 Catalog
PACK SEVEN	3 Rune of Protection: Black	4 Winding Wurm	5 Disciple of Grace	6 Argothian Wurm	7 Polluted Mire	8 Heat Ray	1 Duress	2 Cathodion
	14 Fortitude	13 Blasted Landscape	12 Opal Caryatid	11 Lay Waste	10 Carrion Beetles	9 Rewind		15 Redeem
PACK EIGHT	2 Despondency	3 Steam Blast	4 Peregrine Drake	5 Treetop Rangers	6 Slippery Karst	7 Brilliant Halo	8 Rune of Protection: Green	1 Elite Archers
	15 Cloak of Mists	14 Worn Powerstone	13 Veil of Birds	12 Viashino Outrider	11 Dark Ritual	10 Rescind	9 Monk Realist	

Pro Tour—Los Angeles Hard Data

Heading into Pro Tour—Los Angeles, most players felt that black was the best color to draft. However, popular opinion can often be wrong. *The Sideboard* compiled a great deal of data aboard the *Queen Mary*, including the players' deck colors following each draft, and the results for each of those decks.

The first question we asked was, "Which color combinations would be most popular, and would that change over time as the field was cut to 96?"

The first draft (resulting in 337 decks) yielded the following most popular color combinations (in order): blue-black, green-red, red-white, blue-white, and white-black. In the second draft, three of those five were still among the most popular, as the most common decks were blue-white, white-black, green-black, green-red, and red-black.

The first draft of Day 2 (resulting in 95 decks) yielded the following most popular color combinations (in order): green-black, blue-white, green-red, white-black, and blue-black. And the final draft of the Swiss rounds resulted in these popular combos: red-white, blue-white, red-black, green-red, and blue-black.

The only color combinations to be found in the Top 5 from each draft were blue-white and green-red, and those two were also the most common decks across the tournament as a whole, followed by white-black, blue-black, and green-black.

Next we looked at which decks performed well during the tournament. The two most successful color combinations were actually little-played three-color combinations: red-white-black won nine of its twelve matches, and green-blue-black won two of its three. However, setting those aside, the most successful deck was mono-black, which won 56 percent of its 32 games. These numbers don't include the Top 8 finals, in which Steven O'Mahoney-Schwartz took his mono-black deck to a 3–0 record and the championship title.

After mono-black, the most successful decks were white-black, green-black, green-red, and blue-black. The most popular deck, blue-white, finished just above 50 percent. The least successful two-color deck was green-white, which won just 86 of its 206 matches for a 44 percent winning average.

Finally, we wanted to know which individual colors performed the best: did decks with green in them outperform decks with white in them or vice versa?

We discovered that the most successful color was indeed black. Decks that included black won 51.62 percent of their matches; no other color averaged above 50 percent (the others ranked in the following order: white, red, blue, and green).

It's not immediately clear how meaningful these numbers are, given how close black's 51.62 percentage is with fifth-place green's 49.05 percentage. However, out of a total of 2,792 matches, this ought to have provided a sufficiently large sample size.

Draft Statistics

Colors	R1	R2	R3	R4	Total	% R1	% R2	% R3	% R4
Blue-White	36	38	14	11	99	10.75%	11.55%	14.74%	12.09%
Green-Red	41	30	13	9	93	12.24%	9.12%	13.68%	9.89%
White-Black	34	37	11	8	90	10.15%	11.25%	11.58%	8.79%
Blue-Black	43	27	10	9	89	12.84%	8.21%	10.53%	9.89%
Green-Black	33	33	15	8	89	9.85%	10.03%	15.79%	8.79%
Red-White	36	21	6	12	75	10.75%	6.38%	6.32%	13.19%
Red-Black	20	30	5	10	65	5.97%	9.12%	5.26%	10.99%
Green-White	27	23	3	8	61	8.06%	6.99%	3.16%	8.79%
Green-Blue	15	25	4	9	53	4.48%	7.60%	4.21%	9.89%
Blue-Red	12	20	3		35	3.58%	6.08%	3.16%	0.00%
Green-Red-White	3	6	3	1	13	0.90%	1.82%	3.16%	1.10%
Green-Blue-White	4	7	2		13	1.19%	2.13%	2.11%	0.00%
Green-White-Black	6	6	1		13	1.79%	1.82%	1.05%	0.00%
Blue-White-Black	2	3	2	3	10	0.60%	0.91%	2.11%	3.30%
Black	5	5			10	1.49%	1.52%	0.00%	0.00%
Green-Red-Black	6		1	1	8	1.79%	0.00%	1.05%	1.10%
Blue-Red-White	3	3	1		7	0.90%	0.91%	1.05%	0.00%
Red	2	2		2	6	0.60%	0.61%	0.00%	2.20%
Green-Blue-Red	2	3			5	0.60%	0.91%	0.00%	0.00%
Red-White-Black	3	2			5	0.90%	0.61%	0.00%	0.00%
Green		2	1		3	0.00%	0.61%	1.05%	0.00%
White	2	1			3	0.60%	0.30%	0.00%	0.00%
Blue		2			2	0.00%	0.61%	0.00%	0.00%
Blue-Red-Black		2			2	0.00%	0.61%	0.00%	0.00%
Green-Blue-Black		1			1	0.00%	0.30%	0.00%	0.00%
TOTAL	335	329	95	91	850				

The chart to the left contains the number of decks of each color combination played in each round of Pro Tour—Los Angeles.

The first column ("Color") shows the color combination of each deck. The next four columns ("R1" through "R4") represent each draft round and how many decks of each color combination were played. The next column ("Total") shows how many decks of each color combination were played across the entire tournament. The last four columns ("% R1" through "% R4") show how many decks of each color combination were played in each round, as a percentage of all the decks played in that round.

The table to the right shows every color combination played at Pro Tour—Los Angeles, along with the total games played, games won, lost, drawn (unintentionally), intentionally drawn, and the winning percentage.

The table below shows the same information broken down by color used. It may be of interest that although all colors were drafted equally (because all cards must be drafted by someone), red and blue cards were in over 200 fewer games than black and white over the course of the tournament.

Colors	Games	Won	Lost	Draw	ID	Percentage
Decks with Black	1250	617	577	42	14	51.62%
Decks with White	1278	602	605	47	24	49.88%
Decks with Red	1032	490	502	28	12	49.41%
Decks with Blue	1026	475	488	45	18	49.36%
Decks with Green	1168	552	574	28	14	49.05%

Colors	Games	Won	Lost	Draw	ID	Winning Percentage
Red-White-Black	12	9	2	1		79.17%
Green-Blue-Black	3	2	1			66.67%
Black	32	15	11	4	2	56.67%
White-Black	294	155	129	9	1	54.44%
Green-Black	297	152	135	8	2	52.88%
Green-Red	320	166	148	5	1	52.82%
Blue-Black	304	149	137	12	6	52.01%
Green-Blue-White	43	21	20	1	1	51.19%
Blue-White	324	152	146	18	8	50.95%
Red-White	254	122	118	11	3	50.80%
Green-Red-Black	26	13	13			50.00%
Black-Red-Green	3	1	1	1		50.00%
Blue-Red-Black	4	2	2			50.00%
Blue	4	2	2			50.00%
Blue-Red	109	50	53	4	2	48.60%
Red-Black	204	91	107	4	2	46.04%
Green-Blue	164	70	86	8		45.12%
White	9	4	5			44.44%
Green-White	206	86	110	3	7	43.97%
Blue-White-Black	27	11	15	1		42.59%
Green-White-Black	40	16	22	1	1	42.31%
Green-Red-White	41	16	22	1	2	42.31%
Blue-Red-White	24	9	14		1	39.13%
Green-Blue-Red	16	6	10			37.50%
Blue-Black-White	4	1	2	1		37.50%
Green	9	3	6			33.33%
Red	19	5	12	1	1	30.56%

Junior Super Series Deck Analyses

Mind Over Matter/Dream Halls

Adam Prokopin (First place, 15 to 17)
Rodney Burt, Jr. (First place, 14 and under)
Mike Hall (Second place, 14 and under)
Jay Elarar (Fourth place, 14 and under)
John Meeth (Eighth place, 15 to 17)

Five of the Super Series Western Division finalists played versions of the infamous Mind Over Matter/Dream Halls deck, a successor to the Tolarian Academy deck. It plays much the same way as Tolarian Academy in how it interacts very little with the opponent, and "goes off" in a cycle of drawing and reshuffling and drawing some more. The deck will no longer be legal after April 1, due to the banning of Dream Halls and Time Spiral.

The key cards are Mana Vault (makes lots of mana), Mind Over Matter (untaps Mana Vaults and lands), Dream Halls (plays Mind Over Matter for free), and Time Spiral (draws a whole new hand and recycles your graveyard). The meat-and-potatoes to making the deck run are the card-drawing spells: Stroke of Genius, Meditate, and Brainstorm. Then add Intuition to go get whatever you need, and Counterspell to stop your opponent from interfering with your combo. All five of these players ran four of most of these spells, aside from Mind Over Matter where three was the favorite number. And all five players made almost identical land choices: 18 islands and three Ancient Tombs, with Elarar adding one extra island and Hall adding one extra Ancient Tomb.

Though the core of all five decks was the same, each player made some rather interesting choices to fill out the last few spell slots. Turnabout was an almost universal choice: it can untap your Mana Vaults or lands if you haven't got Mind Over Matter yet, tap your opponent's land if you're worried about counterspells, or tap your opponent's creatures to give you one more turn to put your combo together against a creature rush. Four of the five used Turnabout, but the numbers varied. Prokopin, champion in the older age group, used three Turnabouts and added one Attunement for additional library searching. Burt, champion in the younger age group, went with four Turnabouts and nothing unique. Hall, who placed second in the older age group, skipped Turnabout entirely; instead, he added two Forbids and a Memory Lapse. These extra counterspells may have given him the edge he needed to beat other combo decks. Elarar, last year's Super Series Champion in the younger age group, prepared to defend his title by taking fourth place; he chose two Turnabouts, plus three Mana Leaks to help win countermagic wars and a Scroll Rack for extra library searching. Finally, Meeth squeaked in at eighth place in the older age group with three Turnabouts, two Mana Leaks, and one very "tech" card: Mana Severance. When a Mind Over Matter deck "goes off," it can still choke and die if an unlucky Time Spiral draw gives you no more card-drawing spells. Mana Severance allows you to strip the lands from your deck, making it almost impossible to choke.

Nightmare Survival

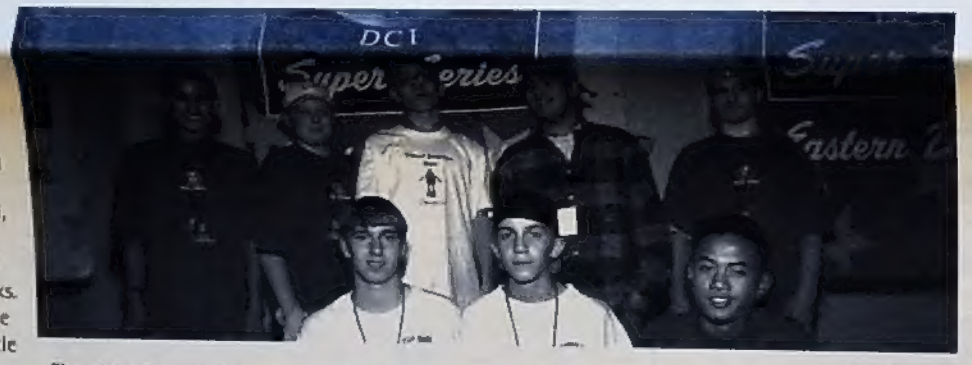
David Fornalski (Second place, 15 to 17)
Troy Goettel (Third place, 15 to 17)
Brandon Mincey (Fourth place, 15 to 17)
Sean Keady (Fifth place, 15 to 17)

Anyone who's been following Magic competition is familiar with the Nightmare Survival deck, which uses Survival of the Fittest to fetch creatures from the library and drop them into the graveyard, and Recurring Nightmare to pull them into play. Half of the 1998 World Championship finalists played Nightmare Survival, and the deck got even stronger when the *Urza's Saga* card set introduced the "free" creatures and Priest of Gix, any of which allow easy creation of unlimited mana generation loops. (This no longer works, by the way—these creatures now have errata making them only untap the lands if they were played as spells from your hand. And as of April 1, Recurring Nightmare itself is banned.)

Nightmare Survival made a strong showing in the older age group, taking second through fifth places. Oddly, none of the younger finalists played this deck.

Decklists for Nightmare Survival tend to be long, with one copy of many different specialized creatures, and the four Western Division finalists are no exception. Only one copy per creature is needed, since the Survival player will search for whatever is needed in a given situation, and then recycle it if more than one is needed. The notable exceptions are Wall of Blossoms and Birds of Paradise. Most players run four of each of these. The Wall provides early defense and an extra card draw to help get the combination, while the Birds provide extra mana and make playing some of the wide variety of creatures possible if you don't get the combination going. Earlier generations of the deck usually included multiple Spike Feeders to help survive fast creature rushes, but against today's combo decks life gaining is far less useful.

Above: Top 8 players in the 15–17 age group
Below: Top 8 players in the 14 & Under age group



The other four-copy cards are, of course, Recurring Nightmare and Survival of the Fittest. This generation of decks has also adopted Duress as a four-copy card, largely as a reaction to the current prevalence of combo decks. If you can Duress away a key card to your opponent's combo, you have a better chance to survive long enough to get your own combo going. All except Goettel's deck included two or three copies of Lobotomy; it's harder to cast, but it leaves a permanent hole in the combo, where Duress only removes the immediate threat.

Mind Over Matter/Energy Field

Philip Freneau (Sixth place, 15 to 17)
Aaron Hiemstra (Fifth place, 14 and under)
Jimmy dela Cruz (Seventh place, 14 and under)

Three of the Western Division finalists played an interesting variation on the Mind Over Matter deck using Energy Field. (These decks will also be illegal April 1, due to the banning of Time Spiral.) Heimstra and Freneau's decks were card-for-card identical, except for one sideboard Mana Leak swapped for a Turnabout. The deck played by dela Cruz used a significantly different selection of countermagic and one fewer Energy Field and Mind Over Matter; he also went with all islands, where as the other two players included four Svyelunite Temples.

The original Mind Over Matter decks used permanents that produced more than one blue mana per tap—Tolarian Academy before it was banned, or islands with High Tide or Mana Flare. These permanents made it possible to play Mind Over Matter quite early in a game. The Dream Halls versions (see above) circumvent the casting cost entirely, again allowing Mind Over Matter to be played early.

The Energy Field decks take an entirely different approach. Instead of putting Mind Over Matter into play quickly, the player plays Energy Field. Now the player can just sit back, relax, and play one land per turn, until he or she has enough land to play Mind Over Matter and "go off" immediately. Energy Field makes the player completely immune to creature swarm decks. Once the player "goes off," the play is the same as any of the Mind Over Matter decks, using just the Mana Vaults as mana multipliers.

Energy Field's weaknesses are land destruction, discard effects, and of course enchantment destruction. If the opponent comes up with any of those before the Energy Field player is ready to "go off," things can get bloody. However, the Energy Field decks run a fair amount of countermagic (seven or eight in the main deck, plus more in the sideboard), so the players have a reasonable shot at surviving even if the opponent has something to wreck their plans.

Frozen Fish

Justin Alpert (Third place, 14 and under)

The least-expected deck in the finals at Pro Tour—Paris '98 was Nicolas LaBarre's "Fish" deck. Justin Alpert used many of the same ideas in Los Angeles, and rode to third place in the younger Super Series age group playing a "Frozen Fish" deck—that is, a Fish deck with Winter Orbs.

Alpert's deck featured an even dozen Merfolk—Manta Riders, Merfolk Looters, and Tidal Warriors—along with four Lords of Atlantis to pump them and grant Islandwalk. Three Tradewind Riders combined with all the weenie creatures for a good chance of setting up a land lock, which would stop any of the combo decks dead in their tracks. Winter Orb also attacked the combo decks' mana supply, though it was less effective given the large number of Mana Vaults and untapping effects present in this environment. Alpert also included quite a lot of countermagic (10 in the main deck and more in the sideboard), which creates additional problems for combo-deck opponents. The mana deprivation strategy doesn't help much against weenie-deck opponents, but with nine sideboard cards against Sligh (not to mention Legacy's Allure in the main deck), Alpert wasn't too worried.

Where Are All Your Lands?

Kirk Cole (Sixth place, 14 and under)

Kirk Cole won applause (as well as a sixth-place finish in the younger age group) for playing a nonstandard deck, which he called "Where Are All Your Lands?" This deck resembles the "Flagpole Control" deck played by Andrew Pacifico to win last year's Super Series Championship. However, in this year's metagame, decks of this sort had largely vanished.

The trademark play of a Flagpole deck is using Tradewind Rider to bounce and recast Wall of Blossoms, gaining an additional card each time. The deck also features Armageddon; if it can get a Tradewind and two other creatures into play and then destroy all the lands, the game is essentially over. The Tradewind also bounces Spike Weaver, either to pump other creatures with +1/+1 counters or to gain multiple "fog" effects. Earlier Flagpole decks included a variety of other creatures with comes-into-play abilities and Spike Feeders for more +1/+1 counters and life gain, but Cole pared his down to just these bare essentials. The rest of the deck consisted of countermagic; Legacy's Allure to gain additional defense against creature decks; Mox Diamonds and Birds of Paradise to help him cast Tradewinds and Armageddon more quickly; and library-searching spells (Brainstorm and Intuition) to help him get everything he needed before a combo-deck opponent could "go off."

White Weenie Plus

Jake Brubaker (Seventh place, 15 to 17)

White-weenie decks have always been a mainstay of Magic. In the combo-heavy environment at this Western Division Championship, though, straight white weenie just couldn't cut it. Brubaker took seventh place in the older age group with a white-weenie deck customized to cope with the combo decks.

Brubaker's deck contained a fairly typical selection of 22 creatures, emphasizing white's strengths of protection from red and protection from black, shadow, and first strike, along with some *en*-Kors to take advantage of the protection. His non-creature spells started with Armageddon, which is also common among white-weenie decks. Everything else, though, was meant to stop the combo decks. He ran two Presence of the Masters in his main deck (and another in the sideboard) to hold off Recurring Nightmare and Dream Halls, along with three Disenchants. He also included four Mox Diamonds and four Cities of Brass for off-color mana, allowing him to run four Duresses in the deck for additional combo disruption.

Lackey Sligh

Chase Altemara (Eighth place, 14 and under)

The last finalist in the younger age group, Chase Altemara, squeaked in with a "Lackey Sligh" deck. This deck contained no weapons against the combo decks except for sheer speed. Altemara tried to destroy his opponents before they could draw their combo cards. His version ran eight one-mana Goblins (including the four Goblin Lackeys, which could drop other Goblins directly into play), eight two-mana Goblins and four two-mana Fireslingers, and four three-mana Ball Lightnings. This mana curve gave him very fast development. His damage spells were equally quick; he shunned X spells entirely, going with Incinerates, Kindles, and Shocks, plus two Sonic Bursts. Cursed Scrolls finished off his slate of cheap efficient damage, and also gave the deck a way to deal with protection from red.

—Beth Moursund

Junior Super Series Western Division Championship Top 8 Decks

Mind Over Matter/Dream Halls

	Prokopin	Burt	Hall	Elarar	Meeth
Attunement	1	-	-	-	-
Brainstorm	4	4	4	2	3
Counterspell	4	4	4	4	4
Dream Halls	4	4	4	4	3
Forbid	-	-	2	-	-
Intuition	4	4	3	4	4
Mana Leak	-	-	-	3	2
Mana Severance	-	-	-	-	1
Mana Vault	4	4	4	4	4
Meditate	4	4	4	3	4
Memory Lapse	-	-	1	-	-
Mind Over Matter	3	3	4	3	3
Scroll Rack	-	-	-	1	-
Stroke of Genius	4	4	4	4	4
Time Spiral	4	4	4	4	4
Turnabout	3	4	-	2	3
Ancient Tomb	3	3	4	3	3
Island	18	18	18	19	18
SIDEBOARD					
Annul	1	-	-	4	-
Arcane Laboratory	4	-	-	-	-
Capsize	-	3	2	1	-
Chill	-	-	3	4	-
Dandan	-	-	-	4	-
Dream Halls	-	-	-	-	1
Energy Field	-	-	-	-	3
Forbid	2	-	-	-	-
Hibernation	-	-	2	1	-
Hydroblast	3	4	4	-	4
Jester's Cap	-	-	2	-	-
Mana Leak	-	2	-	-	2
Memory Lapse	-	-	-	-	1
Power Sink	-	3	-	-	3
Propaganda	-	3	2	-	-
Rescind	3	-	-	1	-
Stalking Stones	2	-	-	-	-
Turnabout	-	-	-	-	1

Mind Over Matter/Energy Field

	Freneau	Hiemstra	dela Cruz
Brainstorm	4	4	4
Counterspell	3	3	-
Energy Field	4	4	3
Force Spike	-	-	4
Intuition	4	4	4
Mana Leak	-	-	4
Mana Vault	4	4	4
Mind Over Matter	4	4	3
Power Sink	4	4	-
Scroll Rack	2	2	2
Stroke of Genius	4	4	4
Time Spiral	4	4	4
Island	19	19	24
Svyelunite Temple	4	4	-
SIDEBOARD			
Chill	4	4	4
Counterspell	1	1	-
Energy Field	-	-	1
Hydroblast	2	2	4
Mana Leak	4	3	-
Rescind	1	1	2
Turnabout	3	4	4

Nightmare Survival

	Fornalski	Goettel	Mincey	Keady
Anarchist	-	-	1	-
Birds of Paradise	4	4	4	4
Dark Hatchling	-	-	-	1
Great Whale	1	-	1	-
Hermit Druid	1	-	-	-
Lhurgoyf	1	-	-	-
Monk Idealist	1	1	1	1
Monk Realist	2	1	1	1
Peregrin Drake	-	1	-	1
Priest of Gix	1	1	1	1
Scrivener	1	-	-	-
Shard Phoenix	1	1	1	1
Spike Feeder	1	1	1	1
Spike Weaver	1	1	-	1
Staunch Defenders	-	-	-	1
Thrull Surgeon	1	1	1	1
Tradewind Rider	2	1	2	2
Wall of Blossoms	4	4	3	4
Wood Elves	1	-	1	-
Duress	4	4	4	4
Earthquake	-	-	-	1
Fireball	-	-	1	-
Intuition	-	4	-	3
Lobotomy	2	-	3	2
Mana Leak	-	2	-	-
Mox Diamond	-	1	-	-
Pyroblast	-	-	3	-
Recurring Nightmare	4	4	4	4
Scroll Rack	2	-	-	-
Stroke of Genius	1	1	-	-
Survival of the Fittest	4	4	4	4
City of Brass	4	4	4	4
Forest	8	7	7	6
Gaea's Cradle	1	-	-	-
Karplusan Forest	2	-	-	2
Pine Barrens	-	1	-	-
Reflecting Pool	-	4	3	1
Sulfurous Springs	-	-	1	1
Swamp	-	4	4	2
Thran Quarry	2	2	3	2
Underground River	3	1	1	3
Volrath's Stronghold	-	-	-	1
SIDEBOARD				
Annul	2	-	-	2
Arcane Laboratory	-	-	2	3
Boil	-	-	3	-
Bottle Gnomes	-	-	3	-
Carrion Beetles	-	-	-	1
Disenchant	2	-	-	-
Gilded Drake	-	-	1	-
Hibernation	2	-	-	-
Jester's Cap	2	-	-	-
Lobotomy	-	-	1	-
Meltdown	-	-	-	2
Monk Realist	-	-	-	1
Order of the Sacred Touch	2	-	-	-
Pyroblast	4	-	1	4
Shard Phoenix	-	-	-	1
Spike Feeder	-	-	-	1
Staunch Defenders	1	-	-	-
Tradewind Rider	-	-	1	-
Wall of Blossoms	-	-	1	-

Jake Brubaker
Seventh place, 15–17
"White Weenie Plus"

CREATURES (22)
4 Paladin en-Vec
2 Soltari Champion
4 Soltari Monk
4 Soltari Priest
3 Soltari Visionary
3 Warrior en-Kor
2 White Knight

SPELLS (16)
3 Armageddon
3 Disenchant
4 Duress
4 Mox Diamond
2 Presence of the Master

LAND (22)
4 City of Brass
17 Plains
1 Thran Quarry

SIDEBOARD
1 Arcane Laboratory
1 Armageddon
1 Disenchant
2 Karma
2 Perish
1 Presence of the Master
2 Warmth
1 White Knight
2 Winter Orb
2 Wrath of God

Justin Alpert
Third place, 14 and under
"Frozen Fish"

CREATURES (22)
1 Gilded Drake
2 Hammerhead Shark
4 Lord of Atlantis
4 Manta Riders
4 Merfolk Looter
4 Tidal Warrior
3 Tradewind Rider

SPELLS (17)
4 Counterspell
3 Legacy's Allure
3 Mana Leak
3 Memory Lapse
4 Winter Orb

LAND (21)
21 Island

SIDEBOARD
3 Annul
3 Chill
3 Hydroblast
3 Propaganda
3 Unsummon

Kirk Cole
Sixth place, 14 and under
"Where Are All Your Lands?"

CREATURES (14)
4 Birds of Paradise
2 Spike Weaver
4 Tradewind Rider
4 Wall of Blossoms

SPELLS (25)
4 Armageddon
4 Brainstorm
4 Counterspell
3 Forbid
3 Intuition
3 Legacy's Allure
4 Mox Diamond

LAND (21)
3 City of Brass
3 Forest
8 Island
3 Reflecting Pool
3 Thran Quarry
1 Volrath's Stronghold

SIDEBOARD
3 Chill
3 Disenchant
3 Hydroblast
3 Planar Void
3 Pyroblast

Chase Altemara
Eighth place, 14 and under
"Lackey Sligh"

CREATURES (24)
4 Ball Lightning
4 Fireslinger
4 Goblin Lackey
4 Goblin Raider
4 Mogg Fanatic
4 Mogg Flunkies

SPELLS (18)
4 Cursed Scroll
4 Incinerate
4 Kindle
4 Shock
2 Sonic Burst

LAND (19)
17 Mountain
2 Wasteland

SIDEBOARD
1 Apocalypse
3 Bottle Gnomes
3 Earthquake
4 Price of Progress
4 Pyroblast